



POEM.

L. F. F. F. F.



POEM,

DELIVERED AT COMMENCEMENT OF THE CLASS OF 1856,

OF THE

College of New-Jersey,

JUNE 25th.

"CANTABIT VACUUS CORAM LATRONE VIATOR."

By JOSEPH HODGSON, JR.
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GULIELMUM B. HODGSON,

SAV. GA.

HOC POEMA, PARVUM TESTIMONIUM

AMORIS, DEDICATUM EST

AB AUCTORE.

POEM.

~~~~~  
“Life is earnest---Life is real.”-- LONGFELLOW  
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I.

As kneeling low, around the chancel stair,
In mutt'rings solemn as the distant roar
Of moaning breakers, on some rock-bound shore,
The dark-cowled monks repeat their wonted prayer;

II.

While deep-toned organs thrill the massive pile,
And marble floors reflect the evening rays,
Which light the altar by their fitful blaze,
And throw their Iris beams along the aisle;

III.

While fretted dome with joyful anthem rings,
Half stifled sobs, with oft-repeated prayer,
Or mournful hymns float on the incensed air
An humble tribute to the King of Kings:

IV.

Without the portal of that Gothic fane, [wave,
Where hurrying crowds roll on their ceaseless
Kneel friendless poor around some moss-grown
grave,
Or list'ning sadly to the muffled strain.

V.

No ear to hearken, but the Blest's above ;
 No eye to shed the sympathizing tear ; [near
 No pure-veiled Nun, with half-told beads, came
 To weep for those whom Christ on earth could love.

VI.

And can they grieve at fortune's bitter rule ?
 And will no pallid, pulseless face gleam bright
 At thought of sorrows gone, and crime made light,
 And hearts washed pure, within Bethesda's pool ?

VII.

Life's troubled waters ever dash, and beat,
 And roll their murm'ring billows to the grave ;
 Earth's sick and starving kneel beside the wave,
 And praying, list for healing angels' feet.

VIII.

Above the altar, where the sunbeam falls
 And lights the alcove by its radiance mild,
 Look down the Virgin and the heavenly Child ;
 Madonna smiling from the sacred walls.

IX.

Without, upon the damp and chilly stone,
 Her soul elated by a new found joy,
 Kneels a poor mother with her starving boy ;
 Magdalen weeping for her mortal son.

THE monk who worships in sequestered cell
 And times his matins by the tolling bell,
 Who begs from God a list'ning ear once more,
 Then spurns the trembling beggar from his door—
 The limner list'ning for the ocean swell,
 The music rising from the Paphian shell;
 Who views the canvas beaming with his thought,
 And praises *self* for what his hands have wrought—
 The hero crimsoned by the crimes of years,
 Who wades to glory through a sea of tears,
 Who builds a splendid fane of dead men's bones,
 And hears sweet music in a nation's groans—
 All madly grasp a poisonous Upas wreath,
 Which decks, but decking, burns the brow beneath.
 False priests! they ever watch the ark of God,
 And hope, vain hope! to view a blooming rod;
 They seek to pluck from richly laden trees
 The golden apples of Hesperides;
 They launch their barks upon life's troubled stream,
 And think that man was only made to dream;
 They gaze at shadows o'er the vessel's side,
 And clutch but bubbles floating on the tide.

The world is not a spar-hung hermit cell,
 Where man must ever listen to the knell
 Of broken hearts, and hope for penance given
 To gain an entrance to a longed-for heaven.
 'Tis no Alhambra with its sparkling jets,
 Its languid beauties, with their castanets,
 Where dancing Silva with some gallant Mars
 Keeps graceful step to Castile's soft guitars.

'Tis no grim Venice with its prison bars,
 Where massive portals close with clanging jars,
 Where heavy silence broods in palace halls
 And dark green ivy clings to crumbling walls,
 Where standing on some moss-grown Bridge of
 Sighs

Some Byron hears the distant murmurs rise,
 Proud Adria moaning with its rising tide
 The long-lost tribute of the Doge's bride,
 Where Tasso's song no more delights the ear
 Or cheers the heart of some gay Gondolier.
 'Tis no dark convent, where on bended knees,
 Man prays and sorrows, like fair Eloise.
 'Tis no dark home, where lamp-lit Cynic dwells ;
 No false Pagoda with its tinkling bells.
 Life is no dream ; man no Protean elf,
 Who misanthropic, cloaks his form in self,
 Who paints Dorados in the realms of Truth,
 And bathes in fountains of perpetual youth ;
 Who gilds all clouds which flit across his dream,
 And views Narcissus in each limpid stream.

Some poet Timon wand'ring on the shore,
 Self-ruined, listens to the distant roar :
 His dark eye brightens as the storm comes nigh,
 His heart rekindles as the waves rise high
 And dash their fury 'gainst the flinty rock ;
 Yon heedless city feels the deadly shock,
 With mighty crash the reeling walls o'erthrown
 Resound with shout and cry and dying groan ;
 He stands enthralled ; hears not the piteous shriek ;
 But in the whirlwind hears the storm God speak.

Some Nero vested with Iskander's power,
 Would stand like Homer on old Ilium's tower:
 No Hindoo widow moaning on the pyre
 With zealous hand applies consuming fire ;
 The blood-stained Vestal of that ghastly fane
 He sees *his* God and sings his lasting reign.
 Some Curtius mounted on his neighing steed
 To save his land, would spur with deadly speed,
 And plunging headlong in the jaws of death,
 Breathes forth *his* praises with his fleeting breath.
 God passed by ; not in that raging storm ;
 Appeared not, fearful, in that flaming form ;
 He spoke not, loudly, in fair Nature's groan
 When reeling earth sent forth its mutt'ring tone ;
 He talks, not now, in Sinai's thund'ring noise,
 But Nature whispers in that still, small voice.

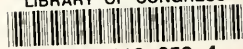
When erst the morning stars their anthems sung,
 And list'ning earth and heaven's high arch-way rung
 With choir angelic, seraphs gathered round
 And joyful listened to the swelling sound.
 When dying groans rose from the cursed tree
 And angels saw our sinful world made free,
 When glorious day dispelled that darksome night
 Heaven clapped its hands and blessed the glad-
 some sight.
 The same sweet music from celestial bands ;
 Memnons which breathe above life's Lybian sands
 Gushes in joyous anthems, swelling high,
 When man for brother man would die,
 When self is lost, and noble deeds impart
 Pure love, the music of a manly heart.

The bird of Eden tries in vain to sing,
 Or stop the ceaseless motion of its wing;
 The bending branches of the bitter fir,
 When drooping low, distils most fragrant myrrh.
 The world *is* real; Life no dreamy hour
 For man to sigh for fair Utopia's bower;
 God's bounteous works which lasting praises give,
 Cry out, " 'Tis not the whole of life to live."

Virginia's son whose beaming eye shot fire,
 Who, sweet-toned Nestor! struck fair Freedom's
 lyre,
 Who made a youthful nation *feel* the tone
 That thrilled the centre of old England's throne,
 And while proud Albion caught the rebel sound
 Shook thirteen jewels from her star-decked crown.
 'Tis such a man who gains an honored name,
 And wins the wreath in life's Olympic game.
 Howards who pray within the prison wall,
 On *them* the Laurel and the Cypress fall—
 Who love the world and for mankind can feel;
 Some Everett pleading for his country's weal.

Those were the real heroes of the world
 Who nobly fought for truth, with flag unfurled;
 With banners streaming to the winds of heaven,
 On whose silvery surface stood engraven
 In brighter letters than those words of yore
 Which gleamed in warning from the temple door;
 And thus, bright gemmed, the glowing motto ran—
 FIGHT ON FOR TRUTH, FOR LIFE IS BUT A SPAN.

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